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Letter dated 16 July 2004 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

I am pleased to transmit to you herewith the statement that I delivered on behalf of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi to the Economic and Social Council on 15 July 2004 (see annex). The oral report to the Council was submitted pursuant to Council resolution 2004/2 of 3 May 2004. I would be grateful if the present document could be circulated as a document of the Council.

(*Signed*) Dumisani S. **Kumalo**
Ambassador
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Annex

Oral statement delivered by the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi to the Economic and Social Council on 15 July 2004

The Council will recall that the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi presented its last report to the Council (E/2004/11) at its organizational session for 2004. In its resolution 2004/2, adopted on 3 May 2004, the Council took note with appreciation of the report, welcomed the recommendations it contained and requested the Group to continue to follow closely the humanitarian situation and economic and social conditions, to examine the transition from relief to development in Burundi and the way in which the international community supports the process and to report, as appropriate, to the Council at its substantive session in July 2004.

Furthermore, I would also recall that the Council decided that the Group should contribute to the assessment of the ad hoc advisory groups, in general, and in particular the lessons learned during the application of its mandate and the implementation of its recommendations. I am pleased to report that the Group took an active part in the informal meeting of the Council held on 3 May to discuss the views on the assessment of the groups. It was particularly important that Mrs. Séraphine Wakana, Minister of Planning, Reconstruction and Development of Burundi, was present at the meeting.

Regarding Burundi, there have been two significant developments in the involvement of the international community in Burundi since the beginning of 2004. The first was the Forum of Development Partners of Burundi organized by the Governments of Burundi and Belgium together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) held in Brussels in January 2004. The second important development was the decision by the Security Council on 21 May, to authorize the deployment of a peacekeeping operation, the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB) during which the African Mission in Burundi was the only mission maintaining peace and security in Burundi. Both of these developments helped support efforts by the Burundians to restore lasting peace and bring about national reconciliation in their country.

In its last report to the Economic and Social Council, the Group stressed the importance of maintaining the momentum and consolidating the peace process. We believe that the establishment of a United Nations peacekeeping mission, which carries the mandate that includes the disarmament and demobilization portions of the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, is an important step towards maintaining stability in the country. The Group has had discussions on all these matters with Ms. Carolyn McAskie, the newly appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the United Nations Operation in Burundi, before she left New York to assume her duties in Bujumbura. The Group agreed with Ms. McAskie that close interaction had to be maintained with the Ad Hoc Group so as to facilitate our support for development, peace and security in Burundi.

The Group has maintained continuous interaction with a wide range of stakeholders and representatives of the international donor community. Burundi continues to experience insufficient support for its dire humanitarian, economic and

social needs. At the Forum of Development Partners of Burundi, Brussels in January 2004, in which the Group took part, commitments were made for support to Burundi that totalled 1.032 billion United States dollars. A follow-up committee to the Brussels Forum was established and has met in monthly donor meetings held in Burundi since then. There is a great deal of interest about the situation in Burundi, as demonstrated by the fact that some representatives of donor countries who are based in Nairobi have travelled to Bujumbura to attend these monthly donor meetings.

The Group urges donors to disburse these promised funds as soon as possible, as requested by Minister Wakana of Burundi when she attended the high-level segment of the Council a few days ago. We also wish to repeat the relevance of an overall "road map", which would confirm the linkages between the various development programmes initiated, as indicated in the final communiqué of the Forum of Development Partners in Brussels.

There have also been positive developments in the areas of debt relief, support to the balance of payments and issues of governance. In the area of debt relief, the authorities of Burundi agreed, on 7 July 2004, on a plan with the African Development Bank to clear their outstanding arrears. This has led to increased involvement of the Bank, which has already sent an assessment mission to identify projects that should provide an incentive for other donors' involvement. Meanwhile, France and Italy have cancelled bilateral debts towards Burundi. Also, Belgium has provided 4 million euros for support to the balance of payments.

Regarding issues of governance, assistance has been granted by various partners, including Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the European Union, the World Bank and UNDP. However, much of it relates to the organization of the elections, scheduled for October/November 2004. During her visit to New York, Minister Wakana briefed the Group on progress made on governance issues, including the drafting of the constitution, whose adoption is a prerequisite for holding the elections. The Group has stressed the need to accelerate and conclude this process as a matter of priority in order to respect the terms set in the Arusha Agreement and proceed with the elections as planned. There is also the need for the reform of the security sector, for which international support is being provided.

As far as the United Nations agencies are concerned, there have been some positive developments. The Executive Board of UNDP approved the country programme for Burundi for the period 2005-2007, which is based on the national priorities developed within the framework of the interim growth and poverty reduction strategy, the common country assessment (CCA) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). The latter was finalized by the agencies of the United Nations system earlier this year. The strategic objectives of this programme include the promotion of good governance to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, the fight against HIV/AIDS and the transition from emergency assistance to a development process, an area whose relevance was stressed by the Group in its report to the Council. The Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also adopted, at its annual session for 2004, its country programme for Burundi and approved a global indicative budget of US$ 37 million, including over US$ 10 million from core resources for the period 2005-2007. I also wish to report that the Government of Japan has decided to support Burundi through its Human Security Trust Fund by funding United Nations

agencies working to reduce vulnerability, particularly among displaced persons and refugees. The Japanese Government contribution is expected to reach US$ 5 million.

While the above-mentioned developments indicate an improvement in the situation of Burundi, it still falls much short of what is really needed in that country. The Group thus wishes to reiterate its call to the donor community to be more forthcoming in providing support to the country, including by contributing to the multilateral debt trust fund established by the World Bank to help the country clear its arrears.

Burundi needs massive support from the international community. While the establishment of ONUB is a major development, the people of Burundi need tangible support and improved living conditions in order to believe in peace and engage in the rehabilitation of their communities. The situation on the ground remains precarious. During the period under review, 52,000 refugees returned to Burundi, most of them facilitated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

As stated in its report to the Council six months ago, the Group considers that Burundi is at a crossroad and that the efforts made by the Government and the people must be matched by strong international support, in the framework of a true partnership. This position remains valid, and the Group feels that further work is necessary in order to create real opportunities for the people of Burundi and to promote a comprehensive approach to peace and development in favour of this country.

There is no doubt that the focus that the Ad Hoc Advisory Group has been able to place on Burundi in the past few months has produced results of which we are proud. However, the road to Burundi's full recovery and reconstruction is long and we have barely taken the first steps. In this regard, it will be useful for the Ad Hoc Advisory Group to continue its activities. The Group also believes that the Economic and Social Council should encourage the donor community that participated in the Brussels Forum to translate their commitments into real resource flows.